

Chapter 06. The Sautrāntika

Historical consideration

The Sarvāstivādins settled in Kashmir, a secluded but cultured land. Its pleasant climate and beautiful scenery was said to be praised by the Buddha himself. This area has attracted and stimulated thinkers and the Sarvāstivādins was one of them. They did not originate in Kashmir but its adherents settled there after attending the Fourth Council of Kanishka.

The orthodox Abhidharmika-s was based in Kashmir. They upheld the authority of the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra (Great Commentary) and came to be known as Vaibhasikas. The dogmatism and intolerance of the Vaibhasikas brought about a reaction from other Sarvāstivādins and resulted in a split of the school into two major camps – the Kashmiran camp and the Gandhāran camp. Kashmir was the stronghold of the orthodox Sarvāstivādins and those outside Kashmir based in Gandhāra were more liberal.

During this period, the two terms, Dārṣṭāntika and Sautrāntika are seen to be used indiscriminately. The leading master at this time was Zrīlāta. The Dārṣṭāntika means illustrators, preachers and meditators all rolled into one. In preaching, and instructing meditation, they are skilled in using similes, poems, and hymns. They used artistic expression to appeal to the laity and the masses.

In the 5th century C.E. the Sautrāntika evolved from the Dārṣṭāntika -s, sometime after the completion of Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra. At that time, the Sautrāntika-s and Dārṣṭāntika-s were used interchangeably. Professor de la Vallee Poussin took Dārṣṭāntika to be a branch of the Sautrāntika school. K'wei-chi, the commentator of the Vijñāptimātrasiddhi-śāstra says that the original teacher of the Sautrāntika school was called Kumāralāta. He appeared a hundred years after the demise of the Buddha and was the author of the Dārṣṭāntamālā- śāstra (Treatise called the Garland of Similes).

Early Dārṣṭāntika-s was not Vibhajyavādins. When this happened, the Dārṣṭāntika-s became Vibhajyavādins. At the early stage of this development, the leaders Dharmatrāta, Buddhadeva, Kumāralāta must have provided much inspiration. The earliest extant text in which the term is attested is the Abhidharma-kośa bhāṣa. Its author, Vasubandhu, is seen to generally favour its views, and accordingly regarded as a Sautrāntika.

Meaning of Sautrāntika (經量部)

Sautrāntika < sūtrānta + ika

What is the meaning of "Sautrāntika"? Sautrāntika are those who take the sūtra as the authority, and they do not take the śāstra (Abhidharma texts) as the authority. This has become a famous statement. The Sautrāntika, a school that was evolved from the Dārṣṭāntika, and came into prominence in the process of repudiating and

criticizing the Abhidharmikas. They descended from the sūtra-dhara (holder of the sūtras) lineage, and therefore esteem the authority of the sūtra-s. Their attitude is basically anti-Abhidharmika-s rejecting the Abhidharma texts as representing the words of the Buddha, but they never seem to have totally rejected the Abhidharma doctrines. However, this is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for being a Sautrāntika. As we have seen, according to both Vasubandhu and Saṃghabhadra, a Sautrāntika cannot be a Sarvāstivādin. Doctrinal differences do matter. Notwithstanding the general lack of doctrinal unity among its adherents, when the Sautrāntika emerged as a distinct school of thought, there are certain doctrines that came to be regarded as distinctive Sautrāntika.

Distinctive Sautrāntika doctrines

1. The Seed Theory (the version already developed by Dārṣṭāntika-s)
2. Transformation of the bases. They restructure the psycho physical being including the mind and body. This theory was adopted and further developed by Yogācāra who emphasized on experience and mediation.
3. Indirect (representational) perception
4. The doctrine of the inferability of the external object

For the Abhidharmika-s, the Abhidharma doctrines are not speculative philosophy or intellectual inventions; they are Buddha-vacana par excellence. Saṃghabhadra replies, 'As the Abhidharma texts were compiled by the great disciples on the basis of the Buddha's teaching, they are approved by the Buddha; they are also Buddha vacana. As they accord with the knowledge

Przyluski's theory

J. Przyluski held that Dārṣṭāntika and Sautrāntika are two names referring to the same group of Buddhist masters: the former is used derogatorily by their opponents; the latter, by these masters themselves with a sense of pride. He further asserts that just as śhrúti (heard) is superior to Smṛti (remembered) in the Vedic religion, śhrúta is superior to drsta (revelation, views) in Buddhism. Many scholars are influenced by him.

Objection to Przyluski's theory

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They are quoted as "Venerable Dārṣṭāntika masters" (譬喻尊者) — hardly pejorative. Dharmatrāta is so highly esteemed that the Vaibhāṣika-s often calls him just 'The Bhadanta'. They are not the only group objected to as regards the use of similes.

The Vaibhāṣika-s themselves use similes quite frequently as doctrinal proofs. As K N Jayatilleke argues, Przyluski is topsy-turvy in claiming that for Buddhism, *drṣṭa* is inferior to *śrūta*.

The interchangeable use of 'Dārṣṭāntika and Sautrāntika' is attested only around Vasubandhu's time. Sautrāntika' does not occur in Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra. Although in the whole Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, 'Sautrāntika' does not occur, Honjo asserts that the term was pre- Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra.

Sautrāntika Critique of Sarvāstivāda

Sarvāstivāda is a Sanskrit term that can be defined as: "the theory of all exists". The Pali equivalent is Sabbatthivāda. Although there is some dispute over how the word "sarvāstivāda" is to be analyzed, the general consensus is that it is to be divided into three parts - *sarva* "all" or "every" + *asti* "exist" + *vada* "speak", "say" or "theory".

The theory of all exists" (*sarvam asti*) is only acceptable in two manners:

1. There are past dharma-s in the sense that they 'existed'. There is future dharma-s in the sense that they 'will come into existence' (not having been).
2. Or, as declared by the Buddha:
"O Brahmin, 'all' refers to the twelve Ayatana-s — eye, form, ... — this is known as 'all'. Should he say: "this is not all; what the recluse Gautama has declared as 'all', that I shall now abandon and establish another 'all' " — he is just verbalizing. Being questioned, [he would not be able to answer]; his perplexity increases. Why? Because [this other 'all'] is not his domain [of experience]." The 'all exist' was explained by the Buddha. 'All' means whatever exist must be within his domain of experience. Outside his experience, what you have not experience, you just verbalize it, he cannot answer as he has not experienced it.

Sautrāntika Bīja theory in Abhidharma-kośa bhāṣa

Regarding the Sarvāstivāda's argument that a past karma must exist or there will be no result that will arise subsequently; the Sautrāntika would say that the result does not arise directly from the past karma: It arises from the karmic efficacy that is continuously passed down in a series initiated by the karma that has become past. This is the Seed theory. In Abhidharma-kośa bhāṣa (477), this theory is more elaborate than that expounded by the early Dārṣṭāntika -s, and the Vibhajyavādins in Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra:

We do not say that the future fruit arises from the karma that has perished. ... It is from the distinctive [last moment] in the serial transformation of that [karma]; like the seed [generating] the fruit. Just as it is said [in the world] "the fruit arises from the seed"; and yet it is not the case that it does not arise from the seed that has perished, nor [does it arise] immediately [after the seed]. ... It is from the distinctive [last moment] in the serial transformation of that [seed]: from the final stage of the flower generated successively from the sprout to the stem to the leaves, etc.; it is then generated from that flower. Why then is it said to be the fruit of that seed? Because the efficacy [for generating the fruit] existing in the flower was induced by it through a succession from it. For, had that [seed] not existed previously, there would

not have been the efficacy in the arising of the fruit which [specifically] corresponds to it. It is thus that the fruit is said to arise from the karma and it is not the case that it arises from the karma that has perished, nor [does it arise] immediately [after the karma]. ... It is from the distinctive [last moment] in the serial transformation of that [karma]

What now is serial continuity? What is transformation? What is the distinctive [last moment]? Serial continuity is that progressive mental succession that proceeds from karma. Its arising differently is transformation. That which, immediately afterwards, is capable of generating the fruit, that, on account of being distinguished from other transformation, is the distinctive transformation.” This means that it starts from one point and goes on progressively, every moment is different and you have a new dharma. A series is a conditioning force of dharma that is going on all the time. A seed is an efficacious karma inside me.

Seed = Nāma-rūpa endowed with efficacy

“What is this so-called seed? It is that psycho-physical complex (Nāma-rūpa 名色) which is efficacious in generating a fruit, either immediately or through a succession, as a result of a progressive transformation of the serial continuity. ... What is this serial continuity? The tri-temporal conditioning forces [— i.e. the dharma-s —] qua causes and conditions.” - Abhidharma-kośa bhāṣa. The seed is Nāma-rūpa endowed with efficacy. Karmic fruit, in between every moment is the effect of the next moment. A fruit can be matured in this present life.

Similar statement in Yogācārabhūmi

“It is not the case that by breaking down the conditioning forces, there [can be found] distinct entities known as ‘seeds’. Nor [can they be found] elsewhere. Rather, these very conditioning forces themselves, of such species, such birth, such arrangement, are called seeds, and also called fruits.”

In Buddhism, there is a recognition that we can reach meditation state where there is no thinking at all and this is recognized by all schools of Buddhist thoughts. In the nirodha-samāpatti debate, the “ancient (Sautrāntika) masters” propose that nāma and rūpa are mutually seeds to each other - (Abhidharma-kośa bhāṣa). They assert that there can be no sentient being that is without matter and no meditation that is without thoughts.

The seed theory has become efficacious and important as the central theory of the Sautrāntika. Kumāralāta strived to avoid eternalism and nihilism -since the seed ceases this is not eternalism; since the sprout is produced, this is not nihilism. Thus the bīja theory originates with Kumāralāta, who attracted followers.

Zrīlāta, the SautrAntika leader

Around the 5th century C.E., Zrīlāta was seen as a leader of the Sautrāntika. Xuan Zang wrote that he studied the “Sautrāntika Vibhāṣa (經部毗婆沙)” in south India.

In Nyāyānusāra, he is often referred to as the Sthavira (‘Elder’), as mentioned as advanced in age. Saṃghabhadra makes him the chief target when refuting the Sautrāntika.

Zrīlāta's anudhātu doctrine

The anudhātu (隨界) is also called pūrva-anudhātu (舊隨界). It is a version of the Seed theory.

pūrva = previous, former;

anu = 'following along';

dhātu = '[causal] element', 'source'.

Taken together, it signifies very clearly a doctrine of the latent (anu) causal efficacies (dhātu) that has been continuously accumulating from previous time (pūrva).

Explanation on the anudhātu

While discussing the four causal conditions (pratyaya) doctrine, Saṃghabhadra introduces Zrīlāta's doctrine:

"The Sthavira asserts: the nature of the 'condition qua cause' (hetu-pratyayatva 因緣性) refers to the pūrva-anudhātu. He (Zrīlāta) states:

"The Fortunate One says in the sūtra: "It should be understood that in such a person, the skillful dharma-s are concealed and the skillful dharma-s become manifest. There exist the accompanying roots of skillfulness which have not yet been cut off. On account of their not having yet been cut off, there is still the possibility of other roots of skillfulness arising from these roots of skillfulness." The accompanying roots of skillfulness are the pūrva-anudhātu, the nature of being the cause successively in the serial continuity (展轉相續能為因性). Such kinds of [causal efficacy] are known as 'condition qua cause'.

The anudhātu is ineffable

They have as their characteristics the dhātu formed from the perfuming of various dharma-s.... The nature (體) of this pūrva-anudhātu is ineffable. It can only be stated to be the six Ayatana-s which, perfumed by karma and defilement, project the effect of another life.

The anudhātu of defilements are called anuzaya. The manifestation of defilements is called enwrapment (paryavasthāna, 纏), for it enwraps the serial continuity in the present. The anudhātu of defilement is called anuzaya, for its causal efficacy constantly accompanies [the series] and lies dormant [therein].

Sautrāntika doctrine of anuzaya & enwrapment in Abhidharma-kośa bhāṣa

The Sautrāntika-s understand "anuzaya kāmarāga" (sensual-attachment–anuzaya) to mean: the anuzaya of kāmarāga. The anuzaya is neither conjoined with nor disjoined from thought, since it is not a distinct entity. The dormant defilement is called anuzaya; the awakened one, enwrapment. And what is its dormancy? It is the continuity of the seed-state of the non-manifested [defilement]. What is awakening? This is the capacity of the personal existence, [itself] born of defilement, for generating defilement. In sainthood, the seeds of defilements are totally destroyed, no more defilements so there comes about a complete transformation. Defilements are due to the wrong ways of seeing things. See the Four Noble Truths as these are path of vision. Nirvāṇa is said to have been obtained as a result of the obtaining – by

virtue of the obtaining of the counteragent (pure prajñā) of a basis which is absolutely opposed to the generation of defilement and rebirth.